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Dark Room Restoration/Preservation

This proposal aims to foster discussion about the benefits of keeping the coop darkroom, and restoring the darkroom to a functioning condition.

There are a few reasons why one should be persuaded to resuscitate the house darkroom. One is the scarcity of darkrooms in Ann Arbor. The School of Art and Design dismantled their darkrooms in 2002. Since then, ancillary darkrooms have been in short supply—there's one in West Quad, another in Washtenaw Community College, and that's about it. It's really an incredibly valuable resource this co-op has.

Another is the general value of preserving analogue photography techniques that are quickly disappearing in virtue of digital photography and darkroom scarcity. Darkroom photographic processing yields images sometimes irreplicable by digital photographic techniques.

A quick inventory of the darkroom indicates that the darkroom was once quite well appointed. A good deal of the non-perishable equipment is still viable, including a working and plumbed wet side for developing prints, two and a half enlargers, and most of the miscellanea necessary for developing photographic prints—trays, tongs, etc. This particular darkroom also has the luxury of being equipped with fan ventilation. A lot of the chemistry for developing prints also remains, but most of this chemistry dates from a decade ago, and will likely have to be discarded.

A list of what will have to be acquired, at the moment, stands as follows:

1. Replacement enlarger bulbs, since the ones currently in the enlargers have long been exhausted.
2. Safelight bulbs and safelight filters—there are working safelight sockets already.
3. New chemistry for developing prints.
4. New enlarger bulbs.
5. Digital timers for exposure.
6. Adjustable easels.
7. Focusing magnifier

Most of this stuff can be had off of eBay and/or craigslist, given the general, recent, trend of disbanding darkrooms. We'd be responsible for de-mucking the current space, as well as maintenance and upkeep thereafter.

That the darkroom exists can be as under-publicized or as well publicized as you'd like. A reluctance to have strangers stomping around in your residence is of course totally understandable. On the other hand, since viable darkroom space is so sought after, it might also be possible to rent out the darkroom on an hourly basis for those seeking space in which to work. For that to be possible, the darkroom would have to be refurbished to a greater degree than would be necessary for just ordinary use, but it ultimately depends on what the co-op would prefer to be done.